

THE PLAN

Raid Team Had Hoped to Surprise Hostage Captors in Ground Assault

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Had the hostage rescue plan worked, the key step called for heavily armed U.S. troops to board vehicles outside Tehran in the dead of night and then race through the city's streets to take the embassy compound by surprise.

The helicopters would not have swooped into the compound under the aborted plan until after the hostages were safely in the hands of the rescue party.

Pentagon and White House officials broadly hinted yesterday that the United States had help inside Tehran in determining the exact moment to strike.

Presumably, the hostages at that moment would have been guarded only lightly by the militants. The planning and repeated rehearsals over the last several months convinced the would-be rescuers that once inside the embassy compound their work would be easy.

"The team itself was convinced that that was the part of the mission of which they were the most confident," Defense Secretary Harold Brown said at his Pentagon press conference yesterday.

Although Brown did not specify the basis of this confidence, other military sources said it rested on absolutely reliable intelligence information on when to hit the embassy and what the situation would be there at the time.

The 90 troops in the specially trained U.S. "Blue Light" rescue team were armed with nonlethal chemical agents to incapacitate the militants, but they were not depending on their use.

Under the rescue plan, the hostages would have been assembled by the troopers, picked up by helicopter and deposited at an undisclosed airstrip outside Tehran where six C130 transport planes would be waiting for them, propellers turning.

The rescue team, the helicopter crews and the 53 hostages would have climbed into the C130s and flown out

of Iran, leaving the helicopters on the ground behind them.

Three separate bases in Iran were mapped out for the operation. One was near Tabas, for refueling the helicopters; a second far enough outside Tehran so the helicopters approaching the city would not be detected; and a third for the escape by C130 transports.

Months ago, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had studied a plan calling for the rescue team to land directly inside the compound by helicopter. But as Air Force Secretary Hans M. Mark disclosed publicly last month, this idea "just wasn't feasible."

The revised plan called for the troops to sneak up on the embassy in vehicles, rather than crash directly into the compound, as was the case in the raid against North Vietnam's prison camp at Son Tay in 1970.

Government officials indicated that the vehicles for the raid had been covertly deployed near Base Two outside Tehran. U.S. troops would have stayed there the first night of the operation and then mounted the raid on the second night—which would have been last night in Washington.

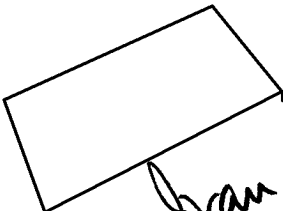
There were also suggestions that the 90-member Blue Light unit Brown talked about publicly yesterday had some backup. It appears that others—

numbers and identities unknown—were deployed ahead of time at Base Two. They were said to have been in the process of being extracted when the White House announced the raid early Friday morning.

Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) raised the possibility of Iranians secretly helping the would-be American rescuers, stating: "There might be a fifth column that we have developed in or around the embassy that was going to help us."

EXCERPTED

MEMORANDUM FOR:


Iran Rescue

Date

26 AUG
1980

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